



Worshiping a Foolish God

2nd in the sermon series "Knowing God"

I Corinthians 1:18-31

Sunday, February 16th, 2020

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

Text: some demand signs while others seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to many and foolishness to others (vv. 22,23)

Several years ago a clergy friend told me about an experience that she had in a jewelry store. She wanted to buy a confirmation gift for her niece. Confirmation gifts are hard things to buy for; what do you buy? A bible? The church already gave her one, if not two. A gift card? Appreciated, but so impersonal. So my friend decided to buy her niece a really nice piece of jewelry, a cross necklace.

She went into a high-end jewelry store and asked if they had gold cross necklaces. "Oh yes," the young female sales clerk said. She led my friend to a glass case and said, "We have two kinds. We have these plain ones over here", she pointed, "and we also have these with a little man on them." We may laugh, but this exchange happened over 25 years ago!

We have become so familiar with the cross that we have become immune to the scandal of the cross. In many circles the cross has become little more than a fashion statement.

It is the scandalous nature of the cross about which Paul wrote when he said that *some demand signs and others seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to many and foolishness to others* (vv. 22,23)

The cross was a symbol of torture and cruelty, blood and death. The crucified were not given a loin cloth to cover their modesty. Death upon a cross was agonizingly slow and was meant to humiliate as well as intimidate. It is no wonder that Jesus recited the opening words of the 22nd Psalm at his crucifixion,

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So when the apostle wrote about the foolishness of the world and the wisdom of God seen on the cross, it is no wonder that they were surprised. What redemption could be found in such a scandalous death? In the midst of a world that defined success in terms of pedigree and wealth came the gospel message, the good news;

God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. (v.21)

Belief is more than a “head trip”. It is more than an intellectual exercise. It is a way of life. It is taking Jesus seriously. It means that we build our lives around His teachings. It means trusting Him with all of our lives. It means believing that in life and in death we belong, body and soul, to the Lord.

Whether the story is apocryphal or not I do not know but on a wall of a concentration camp in Cologne someone scratched these words of faith;

*“I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining.
And I believe in love
even when there’s no one there.
But I believe in God
even when (God) is silent.
I believe through any trial
there is always a way.*

What does taking Jesus seriously look like?

Brene Brown, a sociology professor of an endowed chair at the University of Houston and best selling author of five books, said in a sermon delivered at the Washington National Cathedral in 2018 that we are living in a time of rampant dehumanization. This dehumanization is a slippery down which it is easy to slide. Neurologically we are hardwired to take care of each other. Through the ages this is how we survived as a species. It goes against our biological nature to hurt, maim, torture, rape, belittle, and shame people.

So, when we feel extreme hatred, or more likely than not to be the manifestation of fear, we engage in a process of dehumanization. When we do this, we give ourselves permission to do whatever we want to “the other”, the person or people who are not “like” us. It begins with the words that we use. Every genocide in human history started with a systematic dehumanization campaign. Every single one.

In today’s (Sunday, February 16, 2020) newspaper on the first page under the fold there is a story about how bullying is on the increase in middle school. As the song in South Pacific says, “one has to be carefully taught how to hate.” As our discourse becomes more coarse we see greater divisions in our society. Before you write or enter a post on your Facebook page or before you send that email, remember this, the God who knows the number of our days and the hairs upon our head is reading over our shoulder. And before you make some snarky remark about another or spread a word of gossip, remember that God is eavesdropping on your conversations.

How we treat each other, what we say about and to each other, is not a question of politics but of humanity. It is about which side of humanity that we are on.

As a people of faith, a people who profess to take Jesus seriously, we are called to see the face of God in every single human being. There is nothing more unholy, Brene Brown noted, than stripping another person of their humanity.

At the heart of the Christian faith is Love. *God is love, the evangelist of First John wrote, and whoever abides in love, whoever lives in love, abides or lives also in God. (I John 4:17)*

That little man on the cross that the sales clerk pointed to in the display case, shows us the depth of God's love. It shows us a love that is willing to die for us; die so that we might live. In the cross of Jesus Christ we see the scandal, the scandal of a foolishly loving God who calls us to be fools for Christ by living in loving sacrifice for one another and for all of God's children.

To God be the glory. Amen.